

Meeting of:	CABINET
Date of Meeting:	10 SEPTEMBER 2024
Report Title:	REVISED HOME-TO-SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY
Report Owner / Corporate Director:	CORPORATE DIRECTOR EDUCATION, EARLY YEARS AND YOUNG PEOPLE
Responsible Officer:	ROBIN DAVIES GROUP MANAGER STRATEGY, PERFORMANCE AND SUPPORT
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	The is no effect on the policy framework and procedure rules
Executive Summary:	Following the Cabinet decision on 23 July 2024 to accept proposed changes to the local authority's current Home-to-School/College Transport Policy, this report requests approval by Cabinet of a new revised Home-to-School Transport Policy.

1. Purpose of report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to:

- seek Cabinet approval for the new Home-to-School Transport Policy.

2. Background

2.1 On 23 July 2024 Cabinet considered the outcome of a public consultation on proposed changes to the local authority's current Home-to-School/College Transport Policy. The following five proposals were presented to Cabinet:

- Proposal 1 - Withdrawal of transport for all learners benefitting from an identified and available (safe) walking route to school in line with statutory distances of two miles for primary school pupils and three miles for secondary school pupils.
- Proposal 2 - Removal of the 'sibling' and 'in-receipt' protection for pupils.
- Proposal 3 - Removal of all transport for Nursery pupils (excluding Welsh-medium and faith-based education).
- Proposal 4 - Removal of all Post-16 transport (excluding Welsh-medium and faith-based education).
- Proposal 5 - The offer to parents/carers of pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) the option of a 'personal transport budget'.

2.2 Following consideration of the outcome of the public consultation, Cabinet approved proposals 1-4 only.

3. Current situation / proposal

3.1 To ensure that the local authority meets its responsibility under the Learner Travel Information Regulations 2009, the local authority must publish its learner travel policy and arrangements by 1 October in the year preceding the school year in which the changes will come into force. Therefore, if the new policy is approved and published prior to 1 October 2024, the policy will come into force at the start of the 2025-2026 school year in September 2025.

3.2 As a result of the Cabinet decision to accept policy proposals 1-4 outlined in paragraph 2.1 above, the current Home-to-School/College Transport Policy requires significant amendments. Therefore, a new revised Home-to-School Transport Policy has been drafted and is included at Appendix 1.

3.3 As part of the publication strategy for the new policy, the local authority will advise schools and parents/carers in writing of the impact of the new policy in advance of the September 2025 implementation, including any direct impact on their children's eligibility for free home-to-school transport.

4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)

4.1 A full equality impact assessment (EIA) and Welsh language impact assessment (WLIA) were carried out as part of the development of the policy proposals reported to Cabinet on 23 July 2024. The EIA and WLIA consider the impact of the policy on the nine protected characteristics, the socio-economic duty and the use of the Welsh language. The EIA and WLIA also apply to this new draft policy. The EIA and WLIA are included at Appendix 2 and 3 respectively.

5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

Long-term Ongoing reliance on the local authority to provide free home-to-school transport where this is not supported by national policy will have a significant impact on the ability of the local authority to support and sustain other critical services long-term. National government policy supports active travel and the reduction in the reliance on vehicular transport. Benefits include the reduction in emissions, less dependence on fossil fuels and improvements to health and wellbeing.

Prevention The removal of elements of discretionary transport is not taken lightly. However, there are current tensions in respect of the inequity in the current policy and the requirement of the local authority to maintain support for and to promote the Welsh language. This addresses the inequity in the local authority's Home-to-School/College Transport Policy, this new policy supports and promotes the Welsh language, supports faith-based education and ensures that further budget efficiencies are

available at a time of significant financial and operational pressure on public services.

- Integration** The local authority has a strategic role in facilitating the attendance of pupils to school where they are eligible for free home-to-school transport or where it is provided under the discretion of the local authority.
- Collaboration** The local authority works closely with schools and pupils to ensure that the needs of learners are taken into consideration in the identification and delivery of transport services.
- Involvement** The local authority has involved all sectors of society in consulting on its proposals. This provided sufficient time and resources to fully identify, understand and respond to the issues identified for individuals and their communities.

6. Climate Change Implications

- 6.1 The impact of climate change was considered by Cabinet on 23 July 2024 while making its decision on the policy proposals referenced in paragraph 2.1 above.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

- 7.1 The proposed policy changes reported to Cabinet on 23 July considered the potential impact on children and young people looked after by the local authority.

8. Financial Implications

As was reported to Cabinet on 23 July 2024, the pressure on the home-to-school/college transport budget is significant. The decision by Cabinet to accept proposals 1-4 as identified in paragraph 2.1 means that it is estimated that over £1m of recurring budget reductions can be made from the current home-to-school transport budget in 2026-2027 with a partial saving in 2025-2026.

- 8.1. The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024-25 to 2027-28 includes an indicative budget reduction proposal in respect of home-to-school/college transport of £792,000. Through the adoption of the revised Home-to-School Transport Policy, this budget reduction proposal should now be achieved.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1. It is recommended that Cabinet approve the revised Home-to-School Transport Policy (see Appendix 1) for implementation from September 2025.

Background documents

None